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CALIFORNIAN GARDEN BIRDS.

BY J. G. COOPER, M. D.

THE sociable and confiding disposition of the birds of the western United States as compared with the same species eastward has been noticed by several late writers, but the reasons have so far been scarcely mentioned. Among them perhaps the strongest is that bird-collectors and idle boys are less numerous, while sportsmen find larger game so plenty that they do not waste ammunition on birds so small that no one but a foreigner would take the trouble to pick them for the table.

Besides this, the prevalence of prairies over most of the western regions makes any garden full of trees and shrubs a rare nursery for the woodland species, where they find more protection from hawks and weasels than in their native groves, while they may also levy a small contribution on the fruits in return for the insects they destroy, and their lively songs. In California the poison intended for ground-squirrels has also destroyed millions of birds about the fields, and left them unhurt in gardens.

It is interesting to notice that most of the early travelers in California mention the comparative scarcity and silence of small birds about the first settlements.

In the garden at Haywood, eighteen miles southeast of San Francisco, in which I have before noted the nesting of the Anna humming-birds, so great a variety have built this spring that some notes on the others may be of general interest. The extent of ground is only half an acre around the house in which I live, and most of the nests mentioned are within it. The humming-bird referred to (*Calypte Anna*) is the only species that has built here, though swarms of the Nootka hummer frequented the eucalyptus-trees during April, on their way north. Another nest was built, and the eggs, laid April 23d and 24th, hatched May 11th, thus confirming the remarkably long (from seventeen to eighteen days) period of incubation.

A single *Stellula calliope* was shot April 16th near here. I saw one *Trochilus Alexandri* May 4th, and one *Calypte costæ* May 16th; but these hummers are very rare near San Francisco. An Arkansas kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) has a nest in a tree in the street adjoining the garden, but too high to examine. A black pewee (*Sayornis nigricans*) had built under the eaves of an adjoining barn as early as February, but also too high for close observation. A pair of western bluebirds (*Sialia Mexicana*) had raised a brood of young under the roof of the adjoining house, and all of them have frequented the garden much after May 4th. The well-known summer yellow-bird (*Dendrœca æstiva*) arrived April 20th, and a pair have a nest in the garden, though its site has not yet been discovered.

The barn swallow (*Hirundo horreorum*) builds, as elsewhere, in the barns, against rafters, etc., arriving March 19th. The cliff swallow (*Hirundo lunifrons*) builds under eaves of barns and houses much more abundantly than the last. I saw two instances in town where bluebirds took possession of nests of this bird about the 15th of March, and successfully held them against the owners, which returned from the south on the 24th. A pair of white-bellied swallows (*Hirundo bicolor* var. *vespertina* Cooper) took possession of a little bird-house which I put upon a post twelve feet high, near the house, and have built and laid eggs in it since April 30th. (Some others were building in town after their arrival three months earlier.) They had to drive off a saucy wren which had a nest near by, but had tried to hold two houses by building a sham nest in this one, and often endeavored to tear down the swallows' nest in their absence.

This western variety of the *H. bicolor* is larger and bluer than the eastern, though so far without a distinctive name. I found it breeding in 1873 as far south as latitude 35°, in Ventura County, Cal., near the coast. A house wren (*Troglodytes œdon* var. *Parkmanni*), as just remarked, built in a bird-house placed on the end of the porch. This species arrived March 30th, though a few winter within a hundred miles southward. The male of the pair mentioned came to the garden about the 10th of April, and very industriously worked at building a nest for two weeks before it persuaded a female bird to remain. It sung constantly, but less finely than the eastern birds, from which its longer tail, never held vertically, further distinguishes it.

Two pairs of the house linnet (*Carpodacus frontalis* var. *rhodocolpus*) have nests in a Monterey pine (*P. insignis*), another in a cypress, one under a plank placed in the forks of two trees for a swing to hang on, and one pair in a rose-bush covering the end of the porch, where children can look freely into it. This last had the first egg laid April 22d; incubation began on the 25th, and the young hatched May 6th and 7th, requiring about eleven days. Although thousands are shot in the fruit season on account of their destructiveness, neither the numbers nor the familiarity of this characteristic western bird seem to be diminished. They swarm also in the groves and kill vast numbers of the yet more destructive caterpillars during the spring months, being thus quite as useful as the imported English sparrows.

The Arkansas goldfinch (*Chrysomitris psaltria*), commonly called here "wild canary," abounds in gardens. A pair built in a rose-bush close to the path, and not over three feet from the ground, commencing to set on four eggs April 20th and hatching in ten days. They only raised one young, which left the nest May 16th. Others were fledged when this hatched, and still other pairs were just laying, in nests usually from six to twenty feet up in fruit-trees, one however in a pine. The eggs here are pale greenish or almost white, and 0.45 by 0.60 inch. The Lawrence's goldfinch (*Chrysomitris Lawrencii*), not yet distinguished by any popular name, is also abundant in oak groves, and has varied its habits so far as to begin to frequent gardens where coniferous trees grow, building in pines and cypresses, as the nearest approach in density of shade to the favorite live-oaks, though I have never seen these birds at Monterey, where the former trees are native. Dr. Brewer was evidently led into error by Dr. Canfield's identification of their eggs from Monterey, as given in North American Birds, i. 479, where he says they are "exactly similar to those of *C. psaltria*," etc. Those I got near San Diego in 1862 were, as described in the Ornithology of California, i. 171, "*pure white*, measuring 0.46 by 0.60 inch" (misprinted 0.80), and many found here are merely a little larger, 0.48 by 0.65 inch. A pair of chipping sparrows (*Spizella socialis*) built in a cypress about eight feet above the ground, and others have nests about the garden. They arrived March 31st, and the first egg seen was on May 14th. The gayest of the small summer visitors is the blue linnet (*Cyanospiza amœna*). It arrived April 20th and built a nest in the garden. A nest found in a thicket May 15th contained four nearly fresh eggs, like those described in the Ornithology of California. The brown finch (*Pipilo fuscus* var. *crissalis*), though often called "cañon finch," is not more common in secluded valleys than in gardens where protected; and, being a constant resident, becomes one of the tamest of native species, coming to the door for food and building as near the house as it can find a location. Like other resident birds it shows much variation in time of nesting, as it laid the first egg here as early as April 1st, in a pine-tree, twenty-five feet from the ground, and I suspect some were even fledged by that time, as was said to have occurred in a neighboring garden.

The western oriole (*Icterus Bullockii*) arrived here March 31st. My statement in the Ornithology of California that they arrive at San Diego as early as March 1st applies only to a very few *avant-courriers*, as most of them reach there after the 15th. They reached Ventura County in 1873 about the 20th; but as I saw one in the November previous, a few may winter in California, that being two months later than they usually leave.

A pair built in a hanging branch of a gum-tree (*Eucalyptus*) in the garden, about thirty-five feet from the ground. The male was in the immature plumage (like the female), and another male skinned by me April 24th was similar, so that, like *Icterus spurius*, some of the males, if not all, require more than one year to obtain perfection, a fact not before recorded. Like the *Icterus Baltimore* and the other species as far as known, it probably requires three years, though the stages are not so very different as to have been called *species*, as with *Icterus spurius* and many tropical American forms.

The following birds also built in other gardens in town, but I could not watch them so carefully. The western yellow-bellied fly-catcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) arrived March 30th. One pair built early in May on a beam under a wagon-shed, in the manner of the pewees, but, pertinaciously retaining their woodland habits, tried to conceal the nest by a wall of green moss partly hanging over the edge of the beam and making it still more conspicuous by the contrast of color. Three other nests found along the neighboring creeks were built on slight projections among roots and stumps overhanging the water, from four to twenty feet above it, and all with the same green mossy parapets. I have identified the birds by shooting several. The differences in both young and adult birds between this and the eastern *E. flaviventris* pointed out in the North American Birds, iii. 363, as well as the entire difference in nesting and eggs described on page 380, with which mine agree perfectly, seem to require a specific separation of the western birds, none being found intermediate. In the Ornithology of California, i. 328, I could not distinguish the western adult bird from the incomplete descriptions of the eastern, the young only having then been critically compared.

The *Empidonax pusillus* of Northern California seems, however, to graduate southward into the eastern var. *Traillii* as given by me, though I should have used the prior specific name. The nests and eggs described by me in the Ornithology of California, i. 330, probably belonged to *pusillus*, which I have not seen in this more open region. *E. Hammondii* is a more eastern form.

Swainson's greenlets (*Vireosylvia gilvus* var. *Swainsonii*) arrive about March 30th, and some keep about gardens, where I have found their old nests. None of the characters distinguishing the western and eastern races seem to be invariable, while their songs and habits do not serve to distinguish them specifically. Their arrival at San Diego, April 10, 1862, as published by me, must have been two weeks later than usual.

The western mocking-wren (*Thryothorus Bewickii* var. *spilurus*) is a constant resident, but commonest in winter. A pair built in a small box in a stable, and had young when discovered in April. The open nest in a bush described by me in the Ornithology of California, i. 69, is evidence of an unusual departure from their common habits, and was very probably an old nest built by some other bird, this species generally building in dark cavities of trees, brush-heaps, etc., but now apparently growing more familiar. It shows variations in building similar to *T. Ludovicianus*.

The American goldfinch (*Chrysomitris tristis*) is less common here in summer than the western species, immense numbers going north of this State in April, while the others are not known to occur in Oregon, and most of *C. Lawrencii* go south of this latitude in winter, being then replaced in numbers by this species. On this coast they seem to breed earlier than eastward, as I found several undoubted nests in Ventura County about April 18th, in willows where none of the other species ever appeared. The eggs described by me from Santa Cruz may, however, have been those of *C. Lawrencii*, as they were smaller than usual, perhaps, however, from belonging to a second brood.

I may note here, in connection with this genus of birds, that I killed one of *C. pinus* as late as April 15th, and that they built in the tall pines near Monterey, where I saw them in June, 1874. This most southern locality recorded is accounted for by the cool winds, fogs, and pines of the place.

The California song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia* vars. *Samuelis*, *Heermanni*), like all species of birds which run into many local varieties, is little if at all migratory. Where cats are not too troublesome it becomes the most familiar of birds. The great variations in the size of these birds in California, from which the varieties above named and also *M. Gouldii* have been described (and even placed in other genera), are not confined to any latitude, unless the last (and smallest) was from the peninsula, the middle-sized (*Samuelis*) being found about San Francisco Bay, though more rare than larger ones. In Ventura County I found them to vary in full from 5.65 to 6.25 long, wing 2.40 to 1.80. The eggs also vary exceedingly in size and pattern between the extremes given in Birds of North America, iii. 25 and 27.

I might extend this catalogue of garden birds considerably by mentioning additional species found building in other places in gardens, but less commonly. The following are common here along creeks on the borders of the town, but not yet found building within garden fences.

The Oregon thrush (*Turdus ustulatus*), now known to build as far south as latitude 35° and probably 34° in California, arrived here April 20th, when *T. nanus* had gone north. I have been informed that the robin (*T. migratorius*), never before known to remain in the valleys in this latitude in summer, has begun to breed in cherry orchards three miles from here.

The black-capped warbler (*Myiodioctes pusillus* var. *pileolatus*) arrived March 30, and in Ventura County March 18, 1873. This is a month earlier than I saw them nearer the coast, as noted in the Ornithology of California, i., and accounts for their early appearance in Oregon. It is a month earlier than the summer yellow-bird, for which I mistook it in 1854 at Puget's Sound, arriving April 10th. (Natural History of Washington Territory, ii. 181. These dates also need correction in later books.)

The bank swallows (*Cotyle serripennis*) have holes in the steep banks of the creek, one of which I opened May 17th, and found seven fresh eggs in it at a depth of two feet, and five feet from the top of the bank. The ground wren (*Chamœa fasciata*) is a resident in bushy places along creeks or on dry hills, and often frequents fences about clearings where shrubs or brush are abundant. It is very artful in concealing its nest in dense thickets. The plain titmouse (*Lophophanes inornatus*) is a very sociable bird where its favorite live-oaks are left standing near houses, building in March in any suitable hole it finds. The least titmouse (*Psaltriparus minimus*) is another sylvan bird which remains about houses among oaks and other trees, even in the city of San Francisco. I obtained a nest with seven fresh eggs on May 15th. The western purple finch (*Carpodacus purpureus* var. *Californicus*), though not before seen in summer in the valleys, sometimes remains near the cool bay of San Francisco, and, if not building in gardens, joins the house linnets in their depredations on fruit.

The black-headed grosbeak (*Hedymeles melanocephalus*), a delightful summer songster often called here "bullfinch," is inclined to be very sociable, though its nests are so often robbed by boys for cage-birds that it builds mostly in places more retired than gardens.

The redwing blackbird (*Agelaius phœniceus*, and var. *gubernator*), though preferring marshes, often builds here in small trees on the borders of boggy streams within cultivated grounds, if unmolested. I saw a fine male this spring with the shoulders entirely orange, the opposite extreme from var. *gubernator*. Brewer's blackbird (*Scolecophagus cyanocephalus*) is numerous about houses, and builds in companies in low trees where unmolested. It has recently taken to roosting in winter in the evergreens of the "Plaza" in the noisiest centre of San Francisco, with English sparrows. The California jay (*Cyanocitta Californica*), if not so much persecuted, would be abundant and very bold around houses where oak-trees grow, but the boys drive them to wilder building-resorts. Its thievish habits and practice of destroying other birds' eggs make it a bad tenant. The size of eggs I gave in the Ornithology of California was misprinted 1.80 by 1.04 instead of 0.80 by 1.04; these San Diego eggs being, as usual, smaller than others from northward.

Gairdner's woodpecker (*Picus pubescens* var. *Gairdneri*) is a common visitor to the gardens, and, like its eastern relative, will doubtless burrow for nests in old fruit-trees. The allied *Picus Nuttallii* seems to avoid this region.

The rufous humming-bird (*Selasphorus rufus*), though very familiar in other places at least as far south as latitude 35°, I have not seen here building near houses, though a few do build along creeks, preferring moist locations. On the other hand, the barn owl (*Strix flammea* var. *pratincola*) is very common, and, where protected for the purpose of destroying vermin, becomes familiar. One pair has a nest in a windmill, and another built in a hole in a steep, high bluff at the edge of a garden, where I got fresh eggs April 10th. The nest and eggs mentioned as from me in North American Birds, iii. 522, prove to belong to the *Geococcyx*.

Finally, the California quail (*Lophortyx Californicus*), though becoming rare so near San Francisco, is very tame about houses where it is protected, feeding and laying eggs near the barnyards.